HOUSE PANEL LAGS IN INQUIRY OF C.I.A.

Nedzi Unit, Now 7 Weeks Old, Still Lacks Chief Counsel and Staff Investigators

4-9-75

By JOHN M. CREWDSON
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 8—The House select committee set up in February to investigate intelligence gathering in Federal agencies will be seven weeks old tomorrow, and so far it has no staff director and no staff.

The seven Democrats and three Republicans who make up the panel have met a few times since they were appointed on Feb. 19, but much of the business they have conducted has been through informal conversations on the House floor and over the telephone.

Thus far, the principal topic of their discussions has been the selection of someone for the combined position of chief committee counsel and staff director. Until that post is filled, the process of selecting staff lawyers and investigators to conduct the committee's work cannot begin.

An aide to Representative Lucien N. Nedzi, the Michigan Democrat who heads the select committee, said today that, although a number of overtures had been made to potential candidates, "nobody's been offered the job."

Other sources close to the committee said, however, that a number of persons, including Richard Ben Veniste, the 32-year-old lawyer who he; helped prosecute the Watergate cover-up case, had rejected the committee's overtures.

'Subject to Criticism'

Three weeks ago, the Nedzi aide conceded that if the committee "goes another 10 days" without choosing a counsel, "we'll be subject to the criticism that we haven't moved."

An aide to another Democratic member said today that the Representative he worked for had gone so far as to search out candidates for the job and bring them to Mr. Nedzi's attention, but without success.

"I think," the aide said, "that the question has to arise" as to whether Mr. Nedzi was deliberately delaying action out of some reluctance to set the committee in motion.

An aide to another Democratic committee member added that the delays had caused grumblings about "poor generalship" on Mr. Nedzi's part in the ranks of the majority.

The Nedzi aide countered, however, that the chairman was "getting quite restless" himself, and said that, "like a bit of home cooking," the committee's investigation "has to be done slowly to get the full flavor."

Mr. Nedzi is also chairman of the House Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on Intelligence, which has an oversight responsibility for the Central Intelligence Agency.

Appointment Criticized

His appointment by House Speaker Carl Albert to head the select intelligence panel was criticized by some of Mr. Nedzi's colleagues on the ground that he was too closely identified with Congressional panels that in the past were unable to provide close supervision of the C.I.A.

The intelligence subcommittee headed by Mr. Nedzi held hearings in 1973 on possible C.I.A. involvement in the Watergate cover up and produced testimony that Richard Helms, while Director of Central Intelligence, ordered a subordinate to withhold Watergate information and deny the Justice Department access to a key witness in the first six weeks after the Watergate break-in on June 17, 1972.

But the subcommittee's report on Oct. 23, 1973, on its hearings did not cite Mr. Helm's personal role in withholding the information, and Mr. Nedzi did not call attention to the testimony when he declassified it late last year.

Except for initial interviews after his appointment as chairman of the select committee, Mr. Nedzi has so far declined all requests to make himself available to the press.

Senate Counterpart

By contrast, Senator Frank Church, Democrat of Idaho who heads a counterpart select intelligence committee in the Senate, has held a number of news conferences and has provided several on-the-record interviews.

The select Senate committee, which was voted into existence barely three weeks before the Nedzi panel, named its staff director and committee counsel within a month and has selected about 40 of its full complement of 50 staff members.

The Senate staff has begun to receive documents from the C.I.A. and other Federal agencies and to take sworn depositions from persons who will be called upon to testify when the panel begins public hearings this summer.

The Senate staff has taken over the large auditorium on Capitol Hill that served as a workspace for the Watergate committee's investigators, but the Nedzi panel thus far has occupied only two tiny rooms and holds its meetings in Mr. Nedzi's personal offices.